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Reviews. Reports

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Review of: Dariusz Jemielniak, Aleksandra Przegalińska,
Spółczeństwo współpracy [Collaborative Society], Wydawnictwo
Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2020, pp. 182

Aleksandra Przegalińska, a futurologist and a philosopher, and Dariusz Jemielniak, a sociologist and an economist, have been dealing with the impact of new technologies on the society for years. Their latest book, *Collaborative Society*, written with the help of popular remote collaboration technologies, namely Google Docs and Paperpile, consists of nine chapters discussing selected elements and aspects of the new society. The authors have taken great care to make sure the book is edited in a clear and comprehensible way. They included a glossary and a well-structured system of notes with URLs shortened by the perma.cc system, with timestamps.

The reviewed book is a collaborative work. However, the authors decided to indicate who took the lead in writing particular chapters. The chapters “Introduction”, “Neither »Sharing« nor »Economy«”, “Peer Production”, “Collaborative Media Production and Consumption”, and “Collaborative Knowledge Creation” are ascribed to Dariusz Jemielniak. Aleksandra Przegalińska, on the other hand, played a leading role in drafting the following chapters: “Collaborative Social Activism and Hacktivism”, “Being Together Online”, and “Controversies and the Future of Collaborative Society”.

The concept of the society presented by Przegalińska and Jemielniak is defined in the “Introduction” as a phenomenon which consists in bottom-up, long-term activity of a group whose members have developed specific relationship patterns thanks to collaboration intermediated by technology [Jemielniak, Przegalińska 2020: 16].

In chapter one, entitled “Neither »Sharing« nor »Economy«”, the authors present the concepts of platform capitalism, platform cooperativism, and gig economy, criticising the popular use of these terms and the fact that they are referred only to economic aspects of life. This helps in setting out a more specific definition of the “collaborative society” term, as a concept which reflects current global changes in a better way.

Chapter two is devoted to peer production, both in the narrow (based on shared goods) and the broader (not excluding commerce) sense of the term. In this part of the book, the authors present specific characteristics of the organisation of peer production, including authority, leadership, and heterarchical structure, also considering the motivational and financial aspects and related issues. They indicate that quite many peer production initiatives are characterised by qualities typical for the *free/open source* world. Collaboration, apart from its idealistic aspects, is also characterised by more materialistic goals, such as building one’s portfolio or professional reputation on the basis of active participation in community networking.

Chapter three, “Collaborative Media Production and Consumption”, is devoted to online initiatives, such as memes, both as jokes and as instances of social activism. This “networked rhetoric”, based on the collecting, remixing, and sharing of memes and other forms of Internet creativity, in the authors’ opinion is natural, pleasant and convenient for netizens, but also not free from dangers. The authors emphasize the lack of clarity or ethical standards (similar to those which apply to journalism) in the process of meme publication, which, considering the reach and impact of memes, can be a significant threat to the public sphere. The authors do not try to demonize the dangers, but they point out that building one’s knowledge only by means of the Internet culture, or conditioning one’s online presence only on favourable or unfavourable responses in the social media and platforms is as unreasonable as complete detachment from such media, or, what is even worse, disregard and contempt for virtual reality.

Chapter four discusses timely issues of “Collaborative Activism and Hacktivism”, including slacktivism and cyberterrorism. This part of the book presents types of hacktivism as described by the Wikipedia editors’ community, indicating the complexity of the phenomenon, which is either based on individual motives (mirror sites, doxing, anonymous blogging), or on more collective ones (coding, geo-bombing, RECAP, anti-invigilation activities) [Jemielniak, Przeglasińska 2020: 70]. Beside the presentation of particular initiatives and their analysis, the book contains an overview of critiques of hacktivist movements. Issues such as terrorism, structural impossibility of long-term motivation for action, as well as the tendencies to weaken the involvement in the real world are discussed.

Chapter five (“Collaborative Knowledge Creation”) is devoted to issues which are relevant to the creation of knowledge. The topics covered here include, among others, anti-vaccination movements and DIY (Do It Yourself) movements in science, namely bottom-up tinkering with biology, biohacking, or experiments in technical

fields that ignore generally accepted academic practices. In this part of the book, the phenomenon of anti-science *in gremio* is also analysed. This phenomenon functions as a network of communities consisting of dispersed, but interconnected and mutually interacting social actors who organise actions on alterscience platforms. The animators and leaders of these initiatives, even though they are often university graduates, are not really specialists in a given field, but rather “thought leaders” who, instead of going into intricacies and weighing arguments, only provide a simplistic, persuasive explanation. The emergence of such communities stems from various motivations. It can be related to, among other factors, anti-elitism and the will to create a true civil society or the stipulations to increase one’s impact on the environment. This phenomenon is connected with the craving for change in the field of the creation, popularisation and distribution of knowledge, which results from the loss of trust.

In chapter six, the authors discuss the principles governing the Quantified Self (QS) movement, as well as various gamification models based on wearable technologies. Moreover, they characterise new social groups based on the analysis of biometrical data. This part of the book signals the issues of privacy as well as of the ownership of sensitive data. It also calls for drawing the line between the collaboration with a promising new tracking device and its commercialisation. This will make it possible to establish or negotiate a set of principles with which the producers of wearable technologies should comply. Those principles would regulate the collection, sharing and processing of data, as well as the possibility of their monetisation, considering the inequality of the parties involved (the user and the producer).

Chapter seven (“Being Together Online”) is focused on private and intimate interactions intermediated by the Internet and the resulting forms of collaboration (Airbnb). It discusses the examples of the Second Life immersion game, and applications such as Tinder or Snapchat, as well as the use of their interpersonal relation creating potential in, for instance, political campaigns.

The final chapter contains a summary and an attempt at discussing future implications of Internet-intermediated collaboration. The authors focus on the erosion of authority figures, on filter bubbling, on fake news, as well as on the potential (both positive and negative) of bots and other non-human actors. They draw the readers’ attention to hidden environmental costs of the information technology, to this style of action being taken over by corporations, as well as to the progressing hidden monetisation of bottom-up initiatives such as hackathons.

The book by Jemielniak and Przeglasińska constitutes a collection of articles on seemingly diverse topics, which are combined into a story about technological changes and resulting consequences, illustrated with a vast number of examples. The authors focus on specific communities and describe their practices, taking into account the already existing body of knowledge and the scientific output of other scholars. The language is accessible and comprehensible. The book is also characterised by a meticulous approach to editing and publishing. The chapters are well-developed and written with attention to detail. They include references to theory, descriptions

of observed phenomena, as well as attempts at predicting the perspectives and directions of their future development.

The publication is also carefully prepared as far as bibliography is concerned. Thanks to a separate glossary and a list of resources divided into specific theoretical aspects, reading is easier for those who are not familiar with the subject. This makes the work accessible without affecting its scientific value. It is clearly visible that the "Further Reading" list reflects the research interests of individual authors of the book.

The title term, "collaborative society", which was meant by the authors to be a kind of a framework putting the components of the book together, has quite a lot of descriptive (idiographic) value, but not that much explanatory value. One should agree with the authors that the tendency towards preselective collaboration is one of the attributes of the human species, and, as such, it is enmeshed in structures of power, so it needs to be regulated responsibly. But is collaborative society, thanks to the facilitation of communication provided by new technologies, able to offer something really new, e.g. a significant collective change for the better? The material presented in the book, as well as the changes of the current situation in the world, seem to contradict that, which sends us back to the already proven institutional solutions as an active support for the changes in progress.

Collaborative Society by Jemielniak and Przegalińska is based on the authors' extensive theoretical knowledge and research practice, so its overview of the key areas and methods of collaboration intermediated by technology is an important contribution to the subject. In conclusion, I believe that this book can be recommended to readers and is a valuable item in a scholar's research library. Even those who do not deal with issues related to new technologies as their main field of scientific interest can consider it a good read.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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